

# MARINE SAFETY BULLETIN

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## **MAINTAINING AWARENESS REGARDING AL-QAEDA'S POTENTIAL THREATS**

### **DHS ADVISORY TO SECURITY PERSONNEL, NO CHANGE IN THREAT LEVEL**

**ATTN: Federal Departments and Agencies, Homeland Security Advisors, First Responders  
and Information Sharing and Analysis Centers**

#### **OVERVIEW**

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has been aggressively monitoring and assessing information with other Federal agencies on potential terrorist threats in the United States (US). Based on a recent interagency review of available information leading up to the September 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we remain concerned about Al-Qaeda's continued efforts to plan multiple attacks against the US and US interests overseas. However, at this time, we have no specific information on individual targets or dates for any attack.

Arrests over the past several months of key Al-Qaeda members around the world may have delayed or even disrupted some plans. We do know, however, that operatives still at large view attacks on US territory as a priority and that they continue to pursue a range of targets, tactics, and capabilities to accomplish this objective. Al-Qaeda's primary intent is to conduct synchronized attacks against US interests. At the same time, recent terrorist incidents overseas highlight the possibility that Al-Qaeda could opt to conduct lower-scale attacks against "softer" target sets.

The Department of Homeland Security will continue to work with Federal partners in monitoring and assessing all intelligence reporting relative to Al-Qaeda operations. This Advisory is provided to increase the awareness of appropriate state and local authorities and the private sector responsible for security of critical infrastructure and other potential target sets.

**DHS intends to update this Advisory should it receive additional relevant information, including information provided to it by the user community. Based on this notification, no change to the Homeland Security Advisory System (HSAS) level is anticipated; the current HSAS level is YELLOW.**

## **DETAILS**

### **Aviation Threats**

A growing body of credible intelligence indicates Al-Qaeda continues to develop plans for multiple attacks against targets in the US involving commercial aircraft, with some plans calling for hijacking airliners transiting near or flying over the continental United States—but not destined to land at US airports. Operatives have been studying countries to determine which have the least stringent requirements for entry (visas or other documentation). Identifying which countries have the least restrictive requirements for entry may also tell terrorist operatives which airline flights would be easiest to board and take control in order to crash into targets in the US during over flight. Al-Qaeda's interest in the Transit Without Visa Program (TWOV) [Program Suspended in August] demonstrates that the group sees international flights transiting the US as candidates for takeover and use in aerial suicide attacks against the US.

### **Critical Infrastructure Threats**

Al-Qaeda views critical infrastructure targets in the US as attractive attack options because of their potentially significant economic and psychological impacts. These targets include:

- Nuclear power plants and other energy facilities, including power generating stations, oil storage and distribution facilities.
- Petroleum, chemical, and petrochemical facilities.
- Transportation systems and facilities, including passenger rail, freight trains carrying toxic industrial chemicals, rail and vehicle bridges, tunnel, and mass transit systems.
- Water reservoirs and systems, including dams.
- Food supply, including food production, processing, and distribution facilities.
- Electric power grids.

A demonstrated capability of Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations against an infrastructure-type target involves the use of a vehicle carrying a large amount of explosives, commonly referred to as a car or truck bomb.

### **Chemical, Biological, Radiological, or Nuclear (CBRN) Threats**

As far as we are aware Al-Qaeda to date has not executed a successful terrorist attack using any chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear (CBRN) materials. However, the acquisition, production, or theft of these materials and subsequent dissemination is a top Al-Qaeda objective. We believe it continues to research more advanced CBRN operations, including production of pathogenic organisms and toxins, as well as, high impact dissemination methods such as contamination of water and food, and aerosolization of an agent in enclosed densely populated space.

**Threats against Soft Targets**

Recent mass-casualty attacks in Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and Iraq used car bombs against hotels and housing compounds, suggesting that “soft” targets with minimum physical security measures could be viewed as attractive options in the US. Reports also mention operational plans involving apartment complexes, gas stations, and restaurants.

Previous attacks underscore Al-Qaeda’s ability to employ suicide bombers – a tactic which can be used against soft targets and VIP’s. Terrorists will employ novel methods to artfully conceal suicide devices. Male bombers may dress as females in order to discourage scrutiny. Al-Qaeda operative Richard Reid employed a novel and unique “shoe bomb” device in an attempt to destroy a transcontinental airliner in December 2001.

**All recipients of this bulletin are encouraged to report information concerning suspicious or criminal activity to local law enforcement and the Marine Safety Office at (504) 589-6261 or the National Response center via the 24-hour telephone number at 1-800-424-8802.**